

FR JOHN CERUTTI (1874-1965)



It is my sad duty to inform you of the death of one of the very last of that privileged group who had a personal meeting with St. John Bosco, Fr. John Cerutti, born at Borgomanero (Novara) on September 29th, 1874, and who died in Sydney, Australia, on the 3rd of August, 1965.

John Cerutti was born at Borgomanero (Novara), the son of Charles and Margaret (Fornara). He was sent by his fine parents to Sampierdarena when he was twelve years of age, in October, 1886. Shortly after his arrival the whole House was at fever pitch because it had been announced that Don Bosco would be staying the night there on his way back from Rome. The reason for all this excitement was a mystery to little John until the Saint arrived and he was able to draw close to him. He often told us that he was put under a spell, that he could never fully explain the fascination which took possession of him from that moment. The fascination was so strong that he spent the rest of his life trying to arouse the same feelings in others.

Whenever he spoke, wherever he spoke, he spoke of Don Bosco. He spent years translating the life, the dreams, the sayings, the sermons of Don Bosco into English so that we too could get to know and to love our Founder. Even when the infirmities of old age made writing an almost impossible task he still persevered, filling page after page with his small shaky handwriting.

In 1889 John joined his hero's army and commenced his novitiate at Foglizzo, having as his novice masters Frs. Bianchi and Barberis. He received

the cassock from the hands of the Venerable Don Rua, who also received his first vows in October, 1890.

Twelve months later we see him making his perpetual profession at Valsalice, again into the hands of the first successor of St. John Bosco.

After another twelve months he was sent to Trino Vercellese to do his tirocinium (1892-1895). From 1895 to 1897 he was performing his military service to come back to Milan to study his theology whilst he taught and assisted. He was ordained by Bishop Mantegazza on March 18, 1899 and carried on his work as teacher and assistant in the same House and then commenced his long period of serving God far from his home and dear ones.

In 1904 he was posted to South Africa and for the next twenty years he worked at our House at Cape Town as Prefect and as Confessor and here he would have continued working if an urgent appeal had not reached Turin for English-speaking priests for the Salesian Mission in Northern Australia.

The leader of the Mission, Bishop Coppo, made a special request for Fr. John Cerutti, not only because he was a fluent English speaker, but because he was that type of exemplary religious who are so badly needed to lay solid foundations for a new work.

Fr. Cerutti answered the call and set out for Australia after a trip home to Italy to see his family, the first trip since his departure twenty years previously, and incidentally, his last trip, for he never asked for leave all the long years he was in this land.

When he arrived in Western Australia he found that the Salesians had handed the Mission back to the Pallottine Fathers and he was being asked to proceed to Melbourne where opportunity for a new start in Australia had been promised by Archbishop Mannix.

He arrived in Melbourne in 1925 and became the Superior and Parish Priest of a new foundation at Diamond Creek until 1927 when this parish was handed back to the Archbishop and a new property bought at Sunbury where there was reason to believe that our work could be firmly established.

Fr. Cerutti became a member of the pioneer community. Here he was to be the confessor of the House for the next thirty years, broken only by three years as Priest-in-charge of the Don Bosco Hostel in Melbourne. This ministry of the confessional was one that was very dear to the heart of Fr. Cerutti. The heaviest cross the Lord could have placed on his shoulders, the cross of an ever-worsening deafness, he had to bear for many years. He felt the weight of this cross because it restricted his work in the Confessional. He bore it with patient resignation but only the good Lord knows how he felt this affliction.

In 1957 came the obedience to leave his beloved Sunbury and transfer to Boys' Town, Sydney, where he remained until his death. He must have felt this move at such an advanced age, but his obedience was prompt and cheerful. Here, until a week before his death, he could be seen in the midst of the boys every time they were in the playground. Over the past few years he had to sit under the verandah, but always surrounded by a group of boys, especially the younger ones whom he held enthralled with his tricks and stories.

Fr. Cerutti passed very peacefully to his Creator on the evening of the 3rd of August, after a brief stay in hospital. After a Solemn Requiem Mass

in the Boys' Town Chapel, celebrated by Fr. Ciantar, his body was flown to Melbourne for burial in our own private cemetery at Sunbury. Here Solemn Requiem Mass was celebrated by his wonderful friend of many years standing. Fr. Thomas Little, Parish Priest of North Fitzroy (Melbourne). The Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne presided over the Mass and Burial Service and the panegyric was preached by the Provincial, Fr. W.L. Cornell.

And so another of that band of saintly men who founded this Province has gone to his Creator, but their work and example will live on. We have no doubt of the sanctity of Fr. Cerutti but we recommend him to your prayers that he may soon enjoy the reward promised by our Divine Saviour to all His faithful servants, among which it would be hard to find a more faithful one than the late departed.

Pray also for this House and for him who professes himself your confrere in Jesus Christ,

Edward Power, SDB,

Rector.

*Fr. Cerutti
and parishioners -
Diamond Creek
1925.*



*Fr. Cerutti
presents relic
of St. John Bosco
to children
to venerate -
Sunbury,
Eucharistic
Festival.*